

14 ♦ Poetry

Grief

Ryan Woods

How does one recover
When what one has lost
Is the very life-principle
The dream
That brings to light all darkness
That invades life so easily
As air to a vacuum?
How does one turn oneself around
Sound the horn of "Onward!"
And rage into battle?
Indeed, the word is right -
Rage
That is what one can do.
But when this rage ends
In tears and nausea
And exhaustion -
What then?
Where does one turn for comfort?
To whom does one go
For the balm that heals
The very wound of the heart?
Who can replace one's very soul?
In the quiet hours,
In the soft light of the morning
Or the evening,
Who will fill one with thoughts of pleasure?
Where is that fiery sprite
That lures one onward
Into the night
And onto unknown paths,
Dancing on the horizon,
Half-demon, half-fairy,
Goddess of one's ideals?
Where is the sun
Shining so bright in a moment
And then extinguished?

How can life go on
Without its sun?
Where is the elixir
That invigorates,
Gives life its youthful luster
Restoring to it the glory
Of an unworn child
With virgin eyes?
Where is the spirit
That embodies one's very dreams?
In what manner can one go forward,
When all pathways are dead?
There was once a flower,
A brilliant leaf,
A glorious color -
My dear, the flower is dead;
It is no more.
Can one even bury it?
Can one take one's joy and love
And bury it in the coffin?
No, but it is turned
Into a haunting terror.
When the light of life is extinguished,
Then is the present the dark cloud,
Looking backward on -
Mere memories! -
Of the sunlight.
Do the dead hear our cries?
Can the beloved feel the pain of the lover,
When the beloved does not feel the love?
The answer is no,
Though one might protest
There are others whom the beloved has loved.
Pain is that universal,
That terrible.
Have you heard the dirge
That drowns all laughter?
Have you cried into the night,
Then, exhausted, fallen into nightmare,

To cry again, ever more tired, in the morning?
Where does one go to heal this wound
When the cure itself is gone?
There is nowhere to go.
Dearly beloved,
You were the light of life,
The embodiment of the ideal;
You were the sun and the rain and the sky;
Your laughter was my laughter,
Your tears, likewise, mine;
You were the invigorating force
That gave motion to my life.
Now I hear but a pitiful sound,
Meaningless, really,
Of my fist on resettled dirt.
I may cry,
But no longer will these tears bring forth from the ground
Any life.
I may laugh again;
But it is only an echo.
I may smile;
Once again, just a reflection.
The lake of one's youth is dried up;
The refreshing water that,
Upon the skin
Would scream "I AM ALIVE!
I AM LIFE! I AM JOY IN ITS FULLEST INCARNATION!"
Yes, this lake is gone now;
What's left is -
Not even a puddle -
But a stony basin.
I pick up a stone,
See it glint in the sun.
I pick up another,
And another.
Holding it in my fist
Is some strange ritual
Summoning my memories.
The image is rained upon

By my tears of anguish.
I throw the stone
And hear it clank further away in the basin.
There is an echo.
This echo is my life;
I am but a shade;
My doppelgänger has become myself.
Let the passions flow through me;
That is, indeed, exactly what they will do.
For, no longer can they touch me;
I am gone.
Only loss still gives me form.
Where is that form that once so strongly complemented mine?
Where is the sound that gave voice to my life?
Where is the music that sends away the stillness of death?
It, too, has died.
How can I move on?
How can I move forward?
Is there anything left to give me life?
Am I - can I be - anything more, now,
Than an empty shell?
Perhaps I, too, have died.
Perhaps I, too, am buried there,
In the ground.
I would be persuaded
Were the pain not so strong
And so present yet
In my limbs and stomach.
I vomit.
From where does the meaning come
Now that the meaning is gone?
It cannot come.
But I will yet haunt these hills
And forests
Like the wailing of the wind
Until my frame, too,
Like my heart,
Is dissolved into oblivion.